

Ex-POWS Give Him Ovation

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Nixon Hits Security Leaks

By William Claiborne
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President Nixon denounced the sources of government news leaks yesterday and challenged the federal bureaucracy to adopt a "new sense of responsibility and dedication" in protecting national secrets.

"I think it is time in the country to quit making national heroes of those who steal secrets and publish them in newspapers," Mr. Nixon told an appreciative audience of nearly 600 returned American prisoners of war.

The President's comments during a State Department "briefing" of the returned POWs did not include any reference to a special White House task force he created to stop news leaks. Known as

"the plumbers," the task force is under investigation for alleged illegal domestic surveillance activities.

But his forceful remarks on government confidentiality repeatedly returned to the theme that world peace is dependent on U.S. bargaining strength, and the nation's bargaining strength—in turn—is dependent on government officials who are responsible for keeping secrets.

Mr. Nixon traced the government's role in maintaining secrecy throughout the sensitive stages of the Vietnam war and in preliminary talks with China and the Soviet Union, and he added, "Had we not had that kind of secrecy . . . you men would still be in Hanoi."

The returned prisoners, who

with their wives later attended a gala banquet at the White House, applauded warmly in response to the remarks about national security.

But when Mr. Nixon referred obliquely to the publication of the Pentagon Papers in a sharply critical vein, the ex-POWs rose spontaneously and cheered loudly for nearly a minute.

"We must have confidentiality. We must have secret communications," Mr. Nixon said. Echoing the national security emphasis of his explanation of the Watergate scandal Tuesday, the President added, "I'm going to meet my responsibility to protect the national secrets of America . . ."

Addressing himself to "everybody in the bureauc-

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President Nixon flashes V for victory sign as he gets standing ovation from audience of ex-POWs assembled at State Department.

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racy," Mr. Nixon urged, "If a document is classified, keep it classified."

The former prisoners, some of them still on crutches or hobbling in casts, appeared moved when Mr. Nixon recalled that prior to the peace agreement, he had been admonished: "Bring them home, but bring them home on their feet and not on their knees."

"I can say to you, this is the most distinguished group I've ever addressed, and I've never been prouder of any group," the President declared.

The President alluded to the ex-prisoners' homecoming earlier this year and to the accompanying patriotic speeches made by some upon landing at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines.

"By what you did and what you said, you helped turn this country around . . . You have built up America's faith," Mr. Nixon said.

Before and after his "well done" address in the State Department auditorium, Mr. Nixon acknowledged the cheering ex-prisoners by flashing a "V" sign and the aviator's traditional "thumbs up." Most of the returnees are Navy or Air Force pilots.

While the presidential briefing was going on, Mrs. Nixon and Mrs. Spiro Agnew hosted a reception for the wives and girl friends of the POWs on the eighth floor of the State Department.

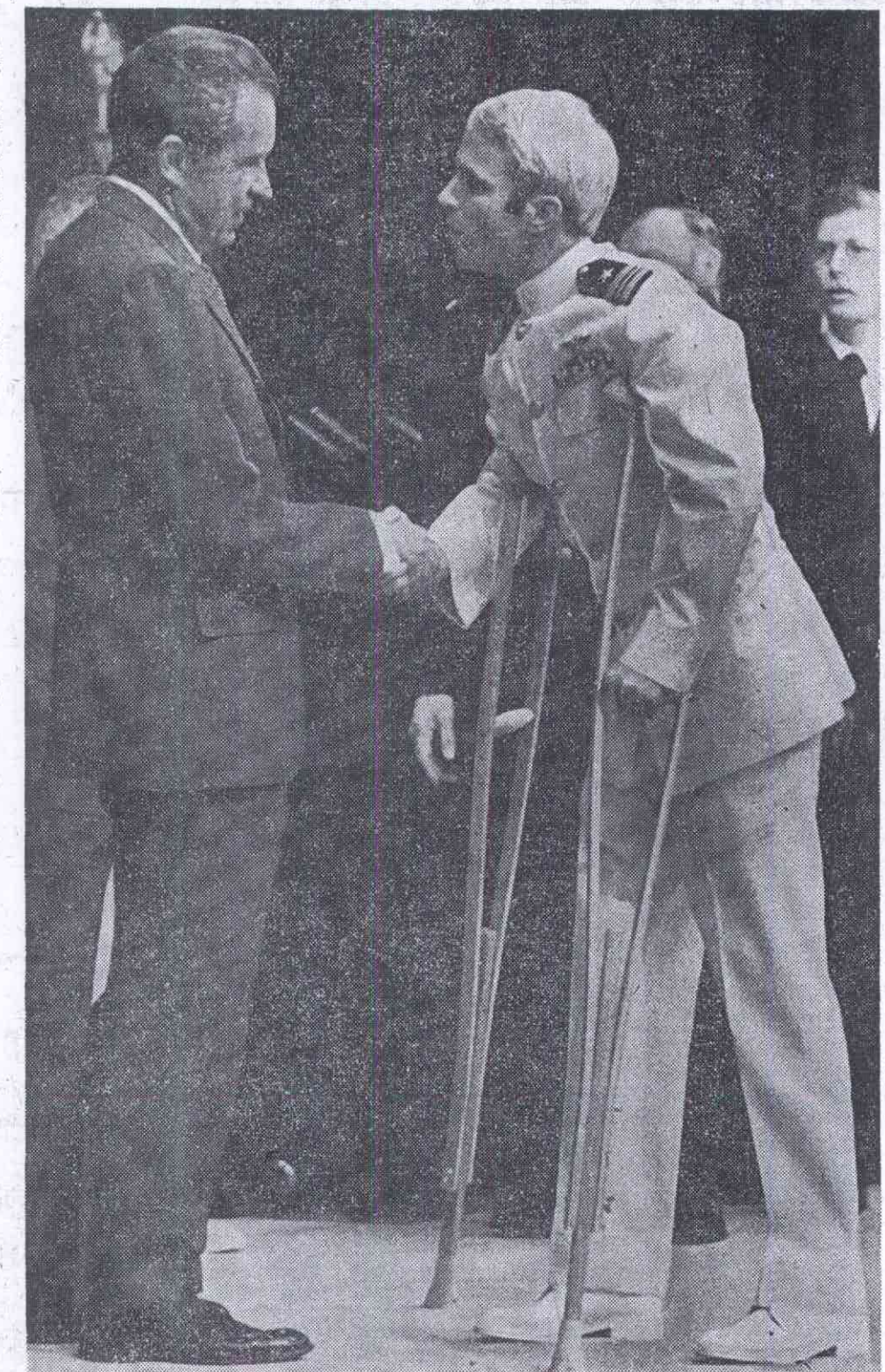
Earlier in the day, the ex-POWs and their guests attended a Bloody Marys-and-breakfast gathering hosted by the Hilton Hotels Corp. and the Washington Hilton.

For many, the occasion was the first stateside reunion since the prisoners' repatriation four months ago.

As Navy whites, Air Force blues and Army and Marine Corps greens blended together in the crowded ballrooms, shouts of recognition went up and happy friends embraced.

"Hey, Moose . . . Hey, Cowboy!" greetings were shouted from table to table, and reminiscences were exchanged in an exclusive sort of way about such places as the Hanoi Hilton, Heartbreak Hotel, the Zoo and other North Vietnamese prison camps.

Many former prisoners talked in excited anticipation of meeting the President in a reception line at the State De-



Mr. Nixon greets Navy Lt. Cdr. John McCain III, shot down near Hanoi in 1967, at

State Department reception for former prisoners, most of them career aviators.

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partment, and, later, of having dinner at the White House.

A few, acknowledging weariness from a seemingly continuous round of homecoming events, talked of solitude.

Lt. Col. Kenneth North, an Air Force pilot from Cape Cod, Mass., said he planned to return home Friday. "I'm going to pull the beach over my head and forget about these

shindigs for a while," North said.

But the main event of the round of celebrations was the red, white and blue banquet and entertainment show last

night on the south lawn of the White House.

Billed by White House officials as "the biggest sitdown dinner" ever held at the Executive Mansion, the affair was an unabashedly patriotic show featuring Hollywood celebrities, more than 200 bottles of champagne and a huge red and yellow striped tent larger even than the main portion of the White House itself.

The tent was erected several weeks ago for the nearly 1,300 guests. About 200 extra waiters were hired and a local caterer provided much of the dinnerware.

The menu—distinctly American fare—included roast sirloin of beef au jus, cornsticks, potatoes, garden vegetables, and strawberry mousse. The wines were from California.